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was both inalienable and impartible. But when partition did actually take place, it was done with the consent of all the members.

Nowadays, occasionally, a Coorg widow who is marrying her dead husband's younger brother is given rights anew in the *okka* of her new husband. This novel custom proceeds from the idea referred to above, that the bride is only given rights in her husband's share of his *okka's* property. It indicates, however, the growing importance of the elementary family among Coorgs.

When, however, the widow wants to marry someone who is not a member of her dead husband's *okka*, her connexion with the latter is first of all ritually broken. She then reverts to her natal *okka*, and at her new marriage her connexion with her natal *okka* is ritually severed, and rights are granted to her in her (new) husband's *okka*.

That is to say, a woman is compensated for the lack of the same quality of rights which a man has in his natal *okka* by the fact that she always enjoys a double membership: she never completely ceases to be a member of her natal *okka*, and at the same time she is a member of her husband's *okka*. She can go back to it under certain circumstances like widowhood or divorce.

Membership of the *okka* is extremely important, and lack of membership in some *okka* or other is tantamount to social extinction. Elders consequently try hard to see that the children of extra-marital alliances get berthed somewhere. It is right and proper that the father of the children should secure them membership of his *okka*, but if for some reason or other he cannot be persuaded to do so, the children are made members of their mother's *okka*.

X

The wife of the headman of the *okka* is the mistress of the household. She is called '*manépaṇikārti*' (house-work-woman). Ideally, all the women in the *okka* have to work under her guidance. The relationship between the various women in the joint family is frequently one of conflict. There is first of all the relationship between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, which is celebrated in Coorg and other South Indian folklore as one of conflict. In a society where the sexes are segregated even inside the household and where elders are very highly respected, the mother-in-law,

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at least in the first few years of marriage, is a much more important relative for a girl than even her husband. And this relationship is basically one of conflict. A girl is also in a relation of conflict with her husband's sisters, married as well as unmarried, and with her husband's brother's wives.

The conflicts between the women in the patrilocal *okka* strike at its solidarity. Elsewhere in south India where partition is easy, they lead to division of the joint family. But in Coorg where the *okka* is a very strong entity, and where partition is legally forbidden, they make the harmonious working of the *okka* extremely difficult.

Besides the conflicts mentioned above, certain lines of cleavage in the *okka* are obvious. The distinction between the sexes, which is present in the whole of the society, is also present in every unit of it. So is the distinction between members of different generations. Enormous emphasis is laid on seniority, and this is visible not only between members of different generations, but also between members of the same generation. The younger member has to behave deferentially towards the older.

Before the introduction, in however grudging a form, of the principle of partition, and of the new ideals associated with industrialization and Westernization, the elementary family was not a powerful unit. It obtained only a grudging recognition in ritual, which was quite consistent with its relative lack of emphasis in the total structure. A tendency of recent times is the strengthening of the elementary family at the expense of the *okka*. The elementary family is increasingly becoming the real residential, commensal, and economic group with certain ties with the *okka* from which it is emerging, or has just emerged.

The existence of these divisions inside the *okka* did not prevent it from acting as a unit in relation to other *okkas*. The *okka* was the basic unit of society, and certain offices like the headmanship of the village, *nāḍ*, and the local temple traditionally ran in certain *okkas*. Again, contribution to collective tasks was on the basis of the *okka*. For instance, each local high caste *okka* had to send at least one man and one woman for every Coorg wedding in the village. Similarly, it had to send representatives to the festival of the village-deity, and for repairing roads and building bridges. All the adult men in an *okka* were required to attend a collective dance or hunt.

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A person's rights in his or her *okka* are represented by twelve pebbles, euphemistically called 'twelve pieces of gold' (*pannaran-ḍachchi pon*). At marriage a girl loses most of her rights in her natal *okka* and obtains them in her conjugal *okka* instead. The bride's family friend transfers eleven pebbles to the groom's family friend. Eleven pebbles are transferred and not twelve. One pebble is retained by the girl's natal *okka* and this is because the bride retains some rights in her natal *okka*. She never loses them entirely. She has always a home from home. Her natal home is called *tā mané* (mother's home?), and a woman always feels tenderly towards it.

A woman has a right to be maintained out of the funds of her conjugal *okka*. She is expected to do her share of domestic work under the guidance of the mistress of the house (*manépaṇikārti*). Not infrequently the mistress of the house is also her mother-in-law.

A woman is entitled to cultivate a patch of ground for ginger and turmeric, and to raise fowl and pigs, and the income from their sale is entirely *her* property which she may hold even against her husband or children. But she may work on this patch only after doing her share of domestic work for the day.[1]

The preference for leviratic unions helped in the assimilation of a woman with her conjugal family. The Coorg saw, 'I will not come down the steps I have climbed up', refers to the fact that once a girl entered her conjugal home she usually stayed there for good, marrying one of the brothers of the husband in the event of the death of the latter. A girl on marriage becomes a member of her husband's *okka* and widowhood by itself does not alter her legal status. She continues to be a member of her conjugal *okka*. In fact, if there are no heirs to her dead husband's *okka* she might be called upon to raise up seed for it by entering into '*okka parijé*' or '*makka parijé*' alliance. She is not permitted, however, to raise up seed for her natal *okka*. There was an instance of this in Nālknāḍ many years ago and it resulted in bitter hostility between the widow's natal and conjugal *okkas*.

Rights in a joint family are referred to as *sammanda*, and *sammanda* may be conferred or withdrawn. At marriage the bride acquires rights in the groom's house, and this is referred to as the

[1] Similarly, in the non-paddy season, men could cultivate small patches of land for ginger and turmeric. But they could only attend to them after they had done their share of the day's work on the ancestral estate.

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groom's *okka* to collect. The water in the well is worshipped before taking a vesselful into the kitchen. (It was seen earlier that the confined woman similarly worshipped the well before resuming her contact with it after an absence of several months.)

At night, on the same day, the bride is given a new name by the women members of the groom's *okka*. This may be the name of a dead woman of the groom's *okka*. Even when the bride is not given a totally new name, some change is effected in her old name.[1] If the bride is divorced later, or if she becomes a widow and wishes to return to her natal house, at the ceremony in which her connexion with her conjugal *okka* is severed, the family friend of her natal *okka* refers to her by the name given to her in her natal house, while the family friend of the groom's *okka* refers to her by the name given to her at marriage. Thus the giving of a new name marks a change in the bride's social personality: she loses her membership of her natal *okka* and becomes a member of the groom's *okka*.

Soon after the bride has carried water from the domestic well into the kitchen, the groom's mother gives her a cup of milk to drink, or a dish of rice and milk sweetened with sugar. In some parts of Coorg she also combs the daughter-in-law's hair on this occasion.

In the patrilocal *okka* the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is very intimate and important. One might say that in the first few years of marriage it is even more important than the husband–wife relationship. The fact of social segregation of the sexes operates against the young husband and wife spending any considerable time together before bedtime. Again, it is not thought proper for the young husband and wife to spend too much time in each other's company. Such a couple will be 'talked about'. A young man must attend to his work, must not encourage his wife to be indifferent to her share of domestic work, and must be respectful to his elders. All this means that he does not get a real chance to be with her till he retires to bed at night.

The daughter-in-law must try and please her parents-in-law: this is one of the main aims of her life. She must do her share of the

[1] *Akkamma* might be changed, for instance, into *Akkavva*. 'Amma' indicates girlhood while 'Avva' indicates womanhood. Some westernized Coorgs do not change names at marriage. The names of dead relatives are not very popular nowadays as they are considered old fashioned.

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606 domestic work under the close supervision of her mother-in-law. She spends most of her time with the latter.[1]

The mother-in-law, too, has her duties towards her daughter-in-law, though in her case her rights vastly outweigh her duties. The ideal mother-in-law is one who is 'like a mother' to her daughter-in-law. She is expected to be kind and protective, and she is usually sensitive to what her neighbours and others say about the way she treats her daughter-in-law.

602 606 It was seen earlier that the ritual giving of milk is an expression of the solidarity that is, or ought to be, prevalent between the persons concerned. In the foregoing instance, the giving of milk (or sweetened dish of rice and milk) is frequently accompanied by the mother-in-law's combing the daughter-in-law's hair. Before a girl's marriage it is usually the mother, or some older female relative, who combs the former's hair and plaits it. Combing is an expression of friendliness. Marriage transfers the bride from her natal house to the groom's house, and the bride passes under the control of her mother-in-law. Solidarity rites are performed on this occasion. That the mother-in-law is equated with the mother is shown in her performing some of the duties which a mother usually does towards her daughter.

606 It is not correct, however, totally to identify the mother-in-law with the mother. The mother-in-law–daughter-in-law relationship is usually one of conflict and the reasons are not far to seek. The daughter-in-law has to obey and respect the mother-in-law as long as the latter is alive. Until her mother-in-law dies her social personality does not attain completion. Also, there is a struggle between the two women for the possession of the son, and this conflict is especially acute in the first few years of marriage. Frequently, the daughter-in-law's relatives do not help to minimize this conflict. The birth of children, however, reduces the intensity of the conflict.

XI

582 The Coorg *okka* is an exogamous unit. Sexual relations with a daughter or sister of a member of the *okka* are regarded as incestuous. A man may not marry the daughter of his father's

[1] All over patrilocal India the mother-in-law–daughter-in-law relation is recognized as a very important relation, and as basically one of conflict. See the author's *Marriage and Family in Mysore*, Bombay, 1942, pp. 191–9.

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582 [539] sweet'. In the ancient marriage song which is sung at every marriage the bride is made out to be the daughter of the groom's father's sister. An old saying tells us, *'tān banda baṭṭena marapakāga'* (one should not forget the path by which one has come): a woman is enjoined not to forget her natal *okka* from which she has come into her conjugal *okka*. One daughter at least ought to go in marriage to the natal *okka* of her mother. Such a system binds two *okkas* very closely, and the loss of a girl to an *okka* is compensated later by the return of the latter's daughter to her mother's natal *okka* in marriage. This is unlike the other variety of cross-cousin marriage in which one *okka* is perpetually recruiting girls from another *okka* without ever repaying.

582 585 The traditional preference for marriage with a cross-cousin comes out in a rite which is performed at marriage. When the groom is leading the bride out of her house after the performance of *sammanda*, he is obstructed at the main door of the bride's house by the bride's cross-cousin. The cross-cousin says that the bride belongs to him and that he will not let her go. It is only when the groom has given him a gold coin that he lets the bride go. The cross-cousin adds another gold coin to the one the groom has given him and ties the two together in a corner of the bride's *sari*. The gold coins now belong to the bride. The incident is nowadays looked upon as a joke.

• 606 596 The preference for cross-cousin marriage expresses itself in ritual, and there are structural reasons for such preference. Among the patrilineal castes all over India, not only is the conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law a common feature of joint family existence, the inability of the daughter-in-law to get on with her affinal kindred is frequently cited as the chief reason for fission in the joint family. The Kannaḍa peasants of Mysore have [539] a proverb, 'A thousand moustaches can live together, but not four breasts'.

The daughter-in-law is a stranger to the groom's kin-group and her interests frequently do not harmonize with the interests of the groom's kin-group. The latter want the joint family to remain united, and the bride obedient to her mother-in-law, and able to get on with her husband's brother's wives and the husband's sisters. The bride finds such an existence irksome, and she would like her husband to leave his joint family and found a separate household. Her kin-group are usually behind her in this, either

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overtly or covertly. But there are other balancing factors: a girl is told from childhood onwards by every elder in her natal household that she should obey her husband and parents-in-law, and that the greatest thing she could do would be to be approved by her affinal kindred. Besides, a man is bound by the most powerful ties to his joint family; and even more important than this is the fact that he does not want to be known as the one who split his joint family.

Where an adult male is entitled to demand his share of the ancestral property, marriage with a stranger girl increases the chances of the division of the joint family. On the other hand, marriage with a relative makes such a division less likely. But among Coorgs certain relatives like the sisters and daughters of agnatically related males and the daughters of one's mother's sisters' daughters are tabooed for marriage. Only cross-cousins remain eligible.

As has already been mentioned, the Coorg *okka* is a very much stronger institution than the joint family of the higher castes of south India. The theory of the impartibility of its traditional property and the preference for leviratic unions buttress it strongly against fission. Add to it the fact that a cross-cousin is commonly chosen for marriage and it becomes almost impregnable.

The departure of a bride from her natal to her conjugal house on the second day of marriage is an occasion charged with emotion: I have seen an adult Coorg brother break down with grief when his sister left for her husband's home after the *sammanda* ceremony. Parents are aware that when they marry their daughter they lose her.

This breaking of the brother-sister bond which is inevitable in a patrilocal society leaves a void which is only filled when the children of the brother and sister intermarry. It may be said that the wound takes a generation to heal. This is only so if it is regarded as an individual instance, as the completion of a single cycle. But it is seen differently if each marriage is regarded as the repayment of a debt incurred a generation ago, as the working out of the principle of reciprocity. The links which are forged today by marriages between two *okkas* are only a continuation of the links which have been forged in the past. The individual instances appear only as points on two or more parallel lines which are linked all the way through. Such a view mitigates the sense of loss which the parents of the girl experience, and also gives them a sense of security as far as the girl is concerned. The prior kinship bonds which prevail

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already and accompanied by the band of the bride's house. The leader of the groom's party is asked to cut down a row of six plantain stems, whereas other relatives are asked to cut down only a row of three stems. The bride's party is treated similarly at the groom's house later.

The fathers of the bride and groom do not meet at marriage. Within a year of the performance of the marriage the bride's natal *okka* invite the groom's father to a feast and the groom's *okka* invite the bride's father to a feast. This is known as 'knowing the relatives' (*bendu ariva*).

The formality which surrounds the relations of the affinal groups lessens with the years. The two groups concerned come together more and more as the years advance and children are born of the marriage. But the formality never totally disappears. Distance and respect may be said to characterize affinal relations for ever. The earlier occasions in which they come together are covered with ritual—ritual respect is scrupulously shown, feasts are given, and gifts are exchanged.

Respect should be shown to parents-in-law, and this is especially required from a girl towards her mother-in-law. A girl does not come very much into contact with her father-in-law, whereas she spends the best part of the day with her mother-in-law, working under the latter's supervision in or about the kitchen.

XIII

The parents of a girl have a right to recover the presents of cloth and vessels which they gave their daughter at her marriage if the girl dies without leaving behind any children in her conjugal *okka*. But if children have been born of the marriage, the mother's personal property goes to them.

The legal position is not, however, as clear as we have made it out to be owing to the fact that lawyers trained in Hindu law have regarded the presents given to the bride by her natal *okka* as *stridhana* (woman's wealth), according to which the movable property presented to a bride by her relatives becomes her own property absolutely. If such an interpretation is accepted, the presents given by Coorg parents to their daughter at her wedding will come to be governed by the same laws as those prevailing among high-caste Hindus all over India. This seems to be another

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instance of the silent and effective transformation of an original Coorg custom into a similar, though not identical, Sanskritic custom.

A girl ought to get married and become a mother, and a mother is honoured among Coorgs. The bond between a mother and child is the most intimate of bonds and this fact expresses itself in ritual. While other relatives, including the infant's father, become free from birth-pollution on the twelfth day, the mother becomes free from pollution only on the sixtieth day. The stronger the bond prevalent the longer is the period of pollution, and this is so in birth as well as death.

When an infant whose milk teeth have not appeared dies, it is buried without ceremony, and a half of a coconut shell containing milk from the mother's breast is kept over the grave. Only the mother is required to take a bath and change into pure clothes.

The special importance of the maternal bond is recognized at marriage also: the mother is the first person to perform *mūrta* to the bride or groom, provided she is not a widow. The mother has to give her money-gift enclosed in a purse, and this is tied to the frontal breast-knot of the bride's *sari*.

It is not only in ritual that the strength of the mother–child bond is acknowledged: a number of proverbs testify to its strength. One compares the motherless child to a crop in drought. Another tells us that the father becomes a firebrand after the mother is dead. In proverbs the mother is the tender figure and she contrasts with the father who is comparatively lacking in affection and fickle. He can be trusted only as long as the mother is alive, and once the mother dies, his affection for his children decreases. He is likely to take up another wife who will be the focus of his interest and attention.

The dependence of children on their mother later gives way to great regard and respect for her, and this fact complicates the husband–wife relationship. A man does not like his wife's criticizing his mother, and even if he discovers that his mother does not treat his wife properly he would be loath to intervene.

The bond prevalent between a mother and her daughter is always a very deep one, and has a great poignancy because the daughter, on marriage, has to leave her natal home for her conjugal home. The mother is aware that her sons have all the rights, privileges, and power in the ancestral house, whereas her daughters have to leave their natal home and spend their lives among people who will, to say the least, be critical of her in the first few years.